



Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2012)

Eugene Carpenter's contribution to this wholly electronic Biblical commentary is a watershed in Evangelical scholarship. In fine prose Carpenter explains the book of Exodus in a pastoral and simultaneously scholarly fashion. Evangelicals, especially of a more conservative bent, will absolutely love it. Critical scholars will not. But naturally the intended audience of the Commentary and the series in which it is placed are themselves conservative in mindset. Given that presupposition, and given the volume's own aims, what follows will accept the volume on its own terms and not analyze it as a foil for a less conservative critical scholarship.

That is not to say, however, that if problems arise they will be overlooked. On the contrary.

First, then, Carpenter's perception of authorship. He writes:

The composition of Exodus is complex and challenging, and is inextricably tied up with the broader issue of the composition of the Pentateuch. The way the author-editor has compiled the great variety of material in Exodus is an example of literary and theological genius. That Moses was in essence the author of the book is indicated by the text itself. Certainly Moses' life and activities account for the origin of the book. That others had a hand in its composition even during the Mosaic era is both asserted and implied, e.g., Joshua, Miriam, Ithamar, Eleazar, and the Levitical priests. Though these people contributed to the formation of the Torah, they were not the author-editor in the sense that Moses was. They were, however, inspired and followed in Moses' inspired leadership and composition of the biblical text.¹

¹ Carpenter, E. (2012). *Exodus* (H. W. House & W. D. Barrick, Ed.). Evangelical Exegetical Commentary. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software (and throughout).

The problem, of course, is that the text of Exodus itself never claims Moses as author. There's not a verse nor a superscription nor a subscript which makes such a claim. So at the end of the day we only have supposition or tradition or both to go by.

Such suppositions, then, as Carpenter's vis-à-vis authorship must, when made, be plainly delineated as just that- suppositions- rather than being presented as anything more. Carpenter is free to suppose whatever he wishes about the book's authorship. But he, and we all, are under absolute necessity to say that's what our suggestions are. Words like 'certainly' are simply, then, inappropriate.

Such introductory matters as date and significance and structure and theological message are best dealt with by readers (as, to be fair, so should authorship questions) as they read through the volume themselves. I would prefer to examine one of the more interesting segments of Exodus and Carpenter's treatment of it: Exodus 4:24-26.

In this pericope, as in every pericope, Carpenter begins with the Hebrew text, followed by textual notes, followed by his translation, followed by the commentary proper, followed by comments concerning 'biblical theology' and concluded with 'application and devotional implications' and a select bibliography.

To give potential readers of the commentary a sense of Carpenter's translating style- here's his rendering of this passage (including his textual notes – which are preserved as footnotes):

24 Now it happened¹ on the way back,² in the lodging place,³ that Yahweh met him⁴ and was seeking⁵ to kill him.⁶ 25 But Zipporah took a flint knife⁷ and cut away⁸ the foreskin⁹ of

¹ See Textual Notes.

² Heb. בַּדֶּרֶךְ (*vadderekh*), "on the way": דֶּרֶךְ (*derekh*) + def. art. + בֵּן (*ben*).

³ Heb. בַּמִּלֶּנֶה (*bammaleneh*), "in the lodging area, field, location, place to spend the night." Cf. Gen 42:27 where the same word probably does not indicate a structural lodging but an area where travelers might stop to stay overnight (cf. 43:21). Cf. Josh 3:8; Judg 10:18; Jer 9:1; 2 Kgs 19:23.

⁴ וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ (*wayyipgeshehu*), qal impf. 3ms > פָּגַשׁ (*pagash*) + 3ms pron. suf. + (waw) consec. The antecedent to the 3ms pron. suf. is questionable, although Moses might be a logical referent, for God has been addressing him about his imminent return trip to Egypt. The interpretation of the passage depends upon whom the exegete believes is referred to here, Moses or Moses' son.

The NIV inserts "Moses" here and in v. 25 in the reference to Moses' "feet" euphemistically. Therefore, the NIV also sees Moses referred to in the first sentence in v. 26. The RSV puts the name of Moses into v. 25, but interprets the verse in the same way as the NIV. The NJPS keeps the ambiguity of the suffixed pronouns in the passage and notes that the "meaning of vv. 25-26 is uncertain." Is the suffixed pronoun at the end of this verse the same as here? See commentary and nn.

her son and touched¹⁰ his genitals¹¹ and avowed, “Indeed, you are a bridegroom of blood¹² to me.”¹³ 26 And so He let him alone.¹⁴ Then¹⁵ was when she said, “A bridegroom of blood,” with regard to¹⁶ the circumcision.

⁵ Piel impf. 3ms > שָׁקַשׁ (*baqash*) + (waw) consec. Cf. Exod 2:15 where the same verb and verbal construction is used to describe Pharaoh’s pursuit of Moses in order to kill him, although here a different verb is used to describe the goal (מִוֶּתֶת, *muth*; vs. הָרַג, *hrg*). But there the def. dir. obj. is given as Moses. Here it is not given and here there is no flight from the assassin.

⁶ Perhaps a subjunctive reading is permissible, “was seeking (him) that he might kill him.” The impf. of the main verb indicates that Yahweh was in the process of seeking to kill the person to whom the 3ms pron. suf. refers. Cf. of course, Gen 17, where anyone not submitting to circumcision was to be cut off from the covenant community. Also, note the need for Joshua to have all Israelites circumcised who were not circumcised when they came out of Egypt (Josh 5:3–8). Moses would have been circumcised already in Egypt by his parents, for they had him for three months (Exod 2:2) and Pharaoh’s daughter may have recognized Moses because of the mark of circumcision (2:6). Moses’ son is most likely referred to here. The vb. שָׁקַשׁ (*baqash*) governs a verbal complement. Here it is the hiph. inf. const. > מִוֶּתֶת (*muth*) + 3ms pron. suf. Cf. IBHS, 602 (§36.2.1d).

⁷ This was a knife that was nothing more than a stone with a well-honed edge on it. See commentary and nn.

⁸ Heb. כָּרַת (*karath*), “to cut, cut away.” This is often used to describe the cutting of a covenant (כְּרִית בְּרִית, *karath berith*), while קָוַם (*qum*) is preferred for the confirmation or affirmation of a covenant. In this context the word is merely describing the severing of the foreskin of Moses’ son.

⁹ עָרַלְתָּ בְּנֵה (*orlath benah*), with a 3fs pron. suf. on the genitive noun.

¹⁰ Heb. נָגַע (*ng’*), “to touch, bring near.” See comment. and nn. This means “to smear” in this context. See summary of blood in chap. 12.

¹¹ לְרַגְלָיו (*leraglaiw*) > רֶגֶל (*regel*) (“foot/feet”) + 3ms pron. suf. is used idiomatically/euphemistically for genitals, but the case is not closed entirely. Cf. Fox, *Names*, 32–33; Sarna, 25–26. The referent for the 3ms pron. suf. might be the “feet” of Moses’ son, Moses himself, the angel of Yahweh (cf. Gen 18–19) or even Yahweh Himself as some have argued. These possibilities are not equally probable. No circumcision by proxy has been mentioned in the Pentateuch. See Textual Notes.

¹² כִּי חַתָּן דָּמִים (*kiy chathan-damim*). See esp. T. C. Mitchell, “The Meaning of the Noun חַתָּן (*chtn*) in the Old Testament,” VT 19 (1969) 93–112. Cf. also the phrase in v. 26.

¹³ The LXX gives Zipporah’s statement as “it is confirmed, fixed, established, accomplished (not merely “stood” for ἔστη, *Estē* in the text) the blood of the circumcision of my child,” i.e. it is done,” ἔστη τὸ αἷμα τῆς περιτομῆς τοῦ παιδίου μου (*Estē to haima tēs peritomēs tou paidiou mou*) (cf. Kosmala, 27–28; Hehn, 6–7). Or it could be translated as “here is the blood of the circumcision of my child,” rather than “the blood of the circumcision of my son” according to Childs, 92 n. 1, 4:24–26. The LXX is offering an unsure translation, evidently even an interpretation, which some exegetes find cogent. The statement is repeated verbatim in v. 26 below, preceded by διότι (*dio ti*), “because, on account of” in the LXX. See commentary and nn. below.

¹⁴ Qal impf. 3ms > רָפָה (*raphah*) + (waw) consec. The question is, of course, who let whom alone. See Textual Notes. Given the broader context it seems that “him” again refers to Moses’ son, not Moses.

¹⁵ אָז (*az*), “Then, at that time.”

¹⁶ Translating לְ (*l*) + def. art. on the noun מִוֶּתֶת (*muloth*). See NIDOTTE, 2:869–70.

Carpenter's translation is fluid and accurate and faithful to the original. His notes are helpful and guide readers, properly I think, to a fuller appreciation of the many, many difficulties of this passage. Even more useful is his exegesis. He writes

Probably the most common interpretation of this passage is as follows: Moses was attacked on the way to Egypt with his family by Yahweh, who sought to kill him because Moses was uncircumcised (Durham, 58). Zipporah saved Moses' life by a *vicarious* circumcision of Moses through her own son. She touched Moses' genitals (feet) with the foreskin of her son; Yahweh accepted the vicarious act for Moses and ceased seeking to kill him. Zipporah addressed Moses as "a bridegroom of blood" because of the circumcision. A more contextually sensitive interpretation at some points is that of Kosmala, who places the son of Moses at the center of the story and drops Moses. However, certainly his interpretation of Yahweh as a Midianite desert deity is wide of the mark. His recognition of the firstborn son motif in the preceding verses as the reason the writer places this text unit here is correct. It has been suggested that this event hints at some kind of "rite of passage" (*Übergangsritus*) and a prefiguring (*Vorabbild*) of Moses' commissioning. Gorospe has more recently suggested that this event pictures Moses at a liminal (involving change or transition from the old to the new) moment in his life and serves to close off the experiences and life of Moses in Midian; Moses is crossing a threshold.

And he concludes

Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:10–13). At Yahweh's command Abraham had circumcised his sons (17:23; 21:3). The word is used twenty-two of its thirty-five occurrences in the Pentateuch. This is the only use of מולות (*mulloth*) as a feminine plural noun. The word is not found to date in other cognate languages, appearing only in the Hebrew Bible. All of the Israelites who were born after Israel left Egypt had to be circumcised (Josh 5:7, 8). It is clear that for Moses to return to Egypt with an uncircumcised son would have hindered his acceptance and effectiveness. In Gen 17:13 the act of circumcision is called "my covenant" (בְּרִיתִי, *berithiy*) in the flesh for an everlasting witness (בְּרִית עוֹלָם, *berith olam*). Ultimately, it becomes clear, it is the heart that must be circumcised to be a true Israelite. Deuteronomy and Jeremiah use the word heart (לֵב, *lev*) as the object of the verb "to circumcise" (מול, *mul*). Many in Israel who were physically circumcised were not circumcised inwardly, in their heart (Deut 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:25). Paul the apostle draws upon the depth of this truth to define a true Jew (Rom 2:28–29).

These two excerpts characterize the volume as a whole: careful, traditionally oriented exegesis with a Christocentric turn.

Consequently, the volume will be of great interest to persons who would identify themselves quite closely with the Evangelical Theological Society or the Catholic Biblical Association. And among those who – more widely – deem themselves 'Evangelicals' or 'Maximalists'. However, those who would classify themselves as 'Minimalists' would not find it all that interesting because it is both traditionally oriented and naively literalistic. But of course the publisher's audience on the whole probably tends to align itself with the 'Maximalist' perspective anyway.

Summa Summarum: I would recommend this volume to my 'Maximalist' friends, because by reading it they would learn a great deal from Carpenter's careful exegesis. And I would also recommend it to my 'Minimalist' friends, because they would learn more than they would imagine from Carpenter's careful exegesis (if not from his historical reconstructions).

Jim West
Quartz Hill School of Theology